

*Paul and the Politics of Diaspora*

Ronald Charles

PCC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014, 978-1-4514-8802-9, \$39.00, xii + 305 hb

This is a readable volume, which pursues an important thesis, namely, that accounts of Pauline theology and epistolography are incomplete without due attention to Paul's diasporic identity. The 'Introduction' (pp. 1-41) sets out some of the key terms and debates in the field, including a helpful summary of various types of diaspora (p. 12) and a useful exploration of the important notion 'hybridity' (pp. 19-21). This is followed by chapters on Jewish diasporic identities (pp. 43-86), on Paul as a Diaspora Jew (pp. 87-123), on how Paul's interacts with other Jewish diasporic voices (pp. 125-62), and with the Gentiles (pp. 163-200). The final chapter considers the role that diasporic concerns with 'home' and 'homeland' shape Paul's concern for the collection in his epistles (pp. 201-46). There follows a brief, but effective, conclusion (pp. 247-60), and a personal epilogue (pp. 261-64).

Charles presents a cogent and sophisticated argument. He presents Paul as engaged in a project common to the quotidian existence of diaspora communities everywhere, namely articulating and living out an identity that is necessarily negotiated, intersectional and contestable. Paul inhabits what Bhabha describes as a 'Third Space' (p. 51). As such, he is *both* fully and *never* quite at home. This analysis is a positive sign for the discipline, in that it suggests that the collapse of the Judaism-Hellenism dichotomy some two decades ago is, at last, beginning to work its way through into more nuanced socio-political analyses. Accordingly, Charles tenaciously resists valorizing Paul, either as a hero or as a villain. Rather, he is presented here neither as a political subversive, constantly re-signifying imperial discourse in plucky resistance, nor as straightforwardly compliant or quietist. Of course, part of the challenge of *this* Paul is, as the author notes in his epilogue, to know what to do with him in the present!